

By A Blinded Officer

AT ST. DUNSTAN'S



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AT ST. DUNSTAN'S

"WELL, sir, what is the verdict?" I asked, wondering whether he would give me one or six weeks before I should again be able to see. This was the first time the bandages over my eyes were removed, and after two weeks of enforced darkness it was not a very great shock to me to find that though the bandages had gone the darkness had not. I was therefore in a cheerful mood when I visited the oculist, vaguely speculating as to how long he would give me before I should get back my sight. His next words hit me with greater force than the German bullet which had laid me low some sixteen days ago.

"I am afraid," he said very slowly, "that I can give you no hope, but then of course we doctors are very often wrong." As the orderly led me back to my ward my thoughts were very low, and to my mother's eager question of, "What did he say?" I hissed out between clenched teeth, "I am blind, blind for the rest of my life."

It is best not to describe some scenes. . . . My mother's pluck at this moment simply astounded me. When we had got over the first shock of the situation, "You will have to go to St. Dunstan's," she said quite cheerfully.

"What's the good?" I growled, "I shall get my pension and that is enough to live on. I don't want and can't get anything else."

"But wouldn't you like to learn to read and write?" she asked. It was a long argument, but in the end, to please my mother, and only to please her, I consented to go to St. Dunstan's, and so it was that in April, 1915, I arrived shy, and to be candid, very frightened, at that house in Regent's Park which sees so much misery and dejection turned into happiness, ambition, and joy of life.

Well, I began first to *learn how to be blind*, which is not easy.

at all, that fraction could somehow tell who was and who was not acquainted with a man Mrs. Piper herself had not known—for he met her only once, as sitter under an assumed name. In other words, the supposed fragment possessed knowledge which was characteristic of G. P., for no other one person could have picked out G. P.'s friends so accurately. Andrew Lang once said that the explanations of common sense may sometimes arouse scepticism, and certainly to some of us a subliminal-fraction explanation of G. P. seems to make great demands on our credulity. It seems a torturing of the evidence; the simpler hypothesis is that of a real G. P., as was claimed. We readily admit that coercive proof of survival is impossible, but it may reasonably be urged that the G. P. evidence is sufficient to justify at least a provisional belief. And it is reinforced by many other incidents which are carefully described in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. In fact, so much good evidence is now available that the *onus probandi* may legitimately be repudiated. We can say to the sceptic: "The proof is there—so far as proof is possible in an inductive inquiry. If you will not accept it, that is your affair; your error be upon your own head. But you need not think any longer that your ignorant mere denial of our thesis is sufficient to dispose of it. The public is now aware of our evidence; you can't bluff them any longer. If we are wrong, *prove it*. We challenge you to produce better explanations if you can. We will accept them gladly, if you can prove that they are better; for we are seeking, not the bolstering up of pet and preconceived beliefs, but the establishment of Truth, whatever it may be."

J. ARTHUR HILL



I was shown how by the help of strips of carpet I could walk about the house without fear of running into furniture ; I was shown how by running my stick along the edges of these strips I could walk from one room to another as quickly and with as much confidence as if I could see ; I was shown how by methods of warning boards let into paths, steps, etc., in the garden, the blind could walk with safety and complete independence. I realized with almost a shock of joy that this most cherished possession (independence) was still within my grasp. My spirits, my hopes and general outlook on life became suddenly much brighter. I found a great fascination in trying to do things for myself, and I then and there made up my mind to learn everything that would make me less dependent on others.

The practical side of learning to walk, etc., was soon mastered, and I now had to tackle the mental side of my education, a much more serious and difficult problem. I started with Braille and type-writing. The former seemed almost impossible at first, but after much hard work I learnt to write first the alphabet, then the many contractions. After about six weeks I found I could read and write fully contracted Braille very slowly but surely. I was gaining confidence in myself every day. I could now walk about the house and garden using my stick very little, without any sign of nervousness, and what pleased me most, without obviously appearing to be blind.

The voices out of the darkness now had a meaning for me, and I could in my own mind place, more or less, the age, size, and vague general appearance of the owners. I found that voices ran very much in types, and after having had one or two of each type described to me, I could tell very roughly the colouring and general character of others of that type.

I had said, "What is the use of going to St. Dunstan's ?" I now understood. With the loss of my sight I had perforce to give up big and small things alike which had played a great part in my life heretofore. At St. Dunstan's I was not only shown how other things could take their place, but actually *given* the things to do so. This reminds me of the day I arrived. When I asked a private soldier, who had been at the hostel some three weeks, what his opinion of Mr. Pearson,* our C.O., was, he said : " I'll

* Now Sir Arthur Pearson.

tell you this, he's always giving. If you ask for anything that costs money he gives it you in the morning, and if you ask for trouble he gives it you in the neck." This statement is, I think, the truest and most descriptive ever made of our "Chief."

When in hospital after first realizing my blindness I could only think of what was *lost* to me for ever. My games, my work, my love of beauty. I remembered the raw afternoons of winter in my country home—how I would get out my gun and with my brown spaniel spend an hour or two walking up hedges and ditches in search of any odd pheasant or rabbit, how I would then return aglow with life and the colours of the sunset sky, to read (and doze) in the friendly blaze of a glorious fire—all this I can visualize yet. . . . In those days every tree, every blade of grass, every stubble- and every root-field had meant more to me than I could say. My love of sport, my perfect happiness in the surroundings of all God's natural beauties, all were now, I felt, for ever lost. I could no longer pick up a book or a magazine during an idle quarter of an hour. Time would become an eternity to me. In a town everything would be the same—whether in Whitechapel or in Bond Street. I would hear footsteps passing, but faces, clothes, class, and sex would not be known to me. I could no longer even look into the shop windows, or drop into a music-hall, restaurant, or theatre to while away a weary hour.

But now what a difference !

Games are possible, for at St. Dunstan's I learnt how to row, play pushball, cards, draughts, and chess; long walks are made easy with a human companion instead of a dog; I can fence and do gymnastics. What I have lost in the beauty of the fields, woods, and sky I have gained in the beauty of human nature. Never before had I realized what kindness and self-sacrifice were in my fellow-creatures. My odd moments are now filled up with reading, making baskets or playing about on my typewriter; when I want to go out everything is made easy, with plenty of people always ready to take me. I am living, of course, an altogether different life, but everything I have lost in the old has been replaced in the new, not by my own effort, but by the endless work, I might almost say slavery, of St. Dunstan's, Mr. Pearson, and all those who help him.

I am blind—it is not easy to convey to the reader what this

means. Moreover I became blind when I was nineteen, and life at first seemed to hold very little in store for me. What I wish to impress on my reader is that my first tragic estimate of the future has been proved wrong since my time at St. Dunstan's. Proved wrong largely through the example and personality of Mr. Pearson (a blind man himself) and through the wonderful spirit of independence and cheerfulness with which the whole place throbs. I am not asking any one to subscribe to St. Dunstan's, this would be a mere platitude, but I ask those who can, to give the institution their attention and their sympathy, so that others who may have to follow in my footsteps may be able to say with me, "Though so much has been taken from us, yet more remains."

A BLINDED OFFICER

May 1916.

THE SERMON IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

SIR LESLIE STEPHEN was a little hard on the sermons of the eighteenth century. "No one," he says, "unless he were confined to a desert island with no other form of literature at hand, could really affect to read them with pleasure. Dull, duller, and dullest are a sufficient critical vocabulary to describe their merits; or, if one would fain discover some less damnatory form of description, it may perhaps be said that they are but one degree superior to the average sermon of the succeeding century." He goes on, however, to describe them as marked with "sincerity" and "common sense." I venture to think that the great critic is not quite consistent in his estimate. If they contain sincerity and common sense, it is rather difficult to see how they can be dull. One is reminded of the immortal individual who admitted she was drunk, but denied disorderly conduct as not in keeping with her character as a lady!

The vogue of the sermon in those days was phenomenal. Not only was it useful from a political point of view—and the name of Sacheverell sufficiently testifies to this—but the sermon was popular in a sense that subsequent history is not acquainted with. Years before the exciting times of Wesley and Whitefield, Richard Lucas the Welshman attracted the crowd in the City of London, and George Stanhope, Dean of Canterbury, about the same time held forth to enormous congregations at St. Paul's and St. Lawrence Jewry.

We all know of the extraordinary scenes that attended the Revival preaching. Whitefield's efforts to get through the crowd to the pulpit, and the thousands that came to hear the two Wesleys are the commonplaces of history. During this same period Romaine's congregations were disturbing the too respectable church officers of St. Dunstan in the West. James Fordyce was

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